

TESTIMONY OF COUNCILMEMBER GEORGE L. LEVENTHAL
BEFORE THE HOUSE ECONOMIC MATTERS COMMITTEE
REGARDING H.B. 370, CLEAN ENERGY PORTFOLIO STANDARD
MARCH 12, 2003

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I hope the committee will act favorably on H.B. 370. Maryland can lead the nation in the development of clean, renewable energy resources. By doing so, we will offer the benefits of cleaner air to the people of this state.

Next week, the Montgomery County Council will pass a resolution establishing that five percent of electricity purchased by the county will come from clean, renewable sources, such as solar, wind or hydroelectric. This resolution, for which I am the lead sponsor, has the full support of County Executive Doug Duncan and the unanimous co-sponsorship of the entire County Council. I am proud that the largest county in Maryland will lead the way by becoming the largest purchaser of clean, renewable energy east of the Mississippi River. I hope the General Assembly will follow our lead by passing H.B. 370.

The response I have received to this resolution in Montgomery County has been overwhelmingly positive. The media coverage, which I was afraid might be skeptical, has been extraordinarily upbeat and serious. The public response has been very good. I have received dozens of supportive phone calls and e-mails, compared with no more than half a dozen critical comments. Clean energy is popular! People understand that our air quality is poor and that local and state governments must take action now to reduce air pollution. And wind power suppliers are contacting me to let me know that the electricity is available now, at a reasonable cost.

The Baltimore-Washington region is in severe non-attainment with the Clean Air Act. If we do not find ways to reduce our air pollution, we could lose all federal transportation funding in 2005. Electricity generation is responsible for about one third of all air pollution. Diversifying our sources of power is one excellent way to meet our obligations under the Clean Air Act.

When state and local government play a leadership role in this area, we are preparing for a cleaner, healthier future for our children. We are creating a market, and new jobs, in non-polluting technologies. And we are filling a vacuum left by the failure of the federal government to adopt an energy policy that makes our nation independent of foreign oil.

Although I know that some utility companies have expressed concern about the very modest goals contained in this legislation, there are also future-oriented utility companies that are investing in clean, renewable energy generation themselves, to be ready for the coming tidal wave of consumer interest. I am confident that Maryland's energy industry will be able to comply with the ten-year goal set forth in H.B. 370 and that it will, in fact, make our energy industry more competitive and better prepared for the economy of the 21st century.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today.